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By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

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To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

SIR,

ALL the faſhionable part of mankind ſet out with the ambition of being thought men of TASTE.

THIS is the preſent univerſal paſſion: but the misfortune is, that like ſportſmen, who loſe their hare, and ſtart coneys, which lead them over warrens, where their horſes break their legs, and fling their riders; ſo in the affair of TASTE, we frequently ſee men following ſome falſe ſcent with the ſame ardour that they would have purſued the proper object of a chace, and with much greater inconveniences.

OF

OF all the various ſubjects that have yet exerciſed the geniuſſes of modern writers, that of TASTE has appeared to be the moſt difficult to treat; becauſe almoſt all of them have loſt themſelves in endeavouring to trace it's ſource. They have generally indeed referred us for it's origin to the polite and imitative arts; whereas thoſe are rather it's offspring, than it's parents. Perhaps their miſtakes in the treating this delicate ſubject may have ariſen from the great reſemblance which FALSE TASTE bears to TRUE, which haſty and inaccurate obſervers will find as difficult to diſtinguiſh, as to diſcern Pinchbeck's metal from genuine gold at the firſt tranſient glance. To the end therefore that the ideas of our fine gentlemen may be ſomewhat more preciſely adjuſted upon this important article, I ſhall venture to aſſert, that the firſt thing neceſſary for thoſe who wiſh to acquire a TRUE TASTE, is, to prepare their minds by an early purſuit and love of moral order, propriety, and all the rational beauties of a juſt and well-regulated conduct.

TRUE TASTE, like good breeding in behaviour, ſeems to be the eaſieſt thing in nature to attain; but yet, where it does not grow ſpontaneouſly, it is a plant of all others the moſt difficult to cultivate. It muſt be ſown upon a bed of virgin-ſenſe, and kept perfectly clean of every weed that may prevent or retard it's growth. It was long erroneouſly thought to be an exotic; but experience has convinced us that it will bear the cold of our moſt northern provinces. I could produce inſtances to confirm this aſſertion, from almoſt every county of Great Britain and Ireland.

THE folly is, that every man thinks himſelf capable of arriving at perfection in this divine accompliſhment: but nature has not diſpenſed her gifts with ſuch profuſion. There is but one ſun to illuminate our earth, while the ſtars that twinkle with inferior luſtre are innumerable. Thus thoſe great geniuſſes, that are perfect models of TRUE TASTE, are extremely rare, while thouſands daily expoſe themſelves to ruin and ridicule by vain and awkward imitations.

PERHAPS to arrive at TASTE, in one ſingle branch of polite refinement, might not be altogether ſo fruitleſs an ambition: but the abſurdity is to aim at univerſal TASTE.

Now

Now this will beſt appear by obſerving what numbers miſcarry even in the moſt confined purſuit of this difficult accompliſhment. One ſeeks this coy miſtreſs in books and ſtudy; others purſue her through France, through Italy, nay through Spain; and after all their labours, we have frequently ſeen them ridiculouſly embracing pedantry and foppery with the raptures due alone to TASTE. Thus it happens with many deluded travellers in the fields of gallantry, who enjoy fancied familiarities with women of the firſt rank, whoſe names and titles ſtrumpets have aſſumed, to deceive the vain, the ignorant, and the unwary.

IT is thought the BONA DEA of the Romans, was nothing more than the goddeſs of TASTE. Ladies alone were admitted into her myſteries. The natural indelicacy indeed of the ſtronger ſex ſeems to countenance this opinion; women in general having finer and more exquiſite ſenſations than men; and it is a thorough acquaintance with the virtues and charms of that moſt amiable part of our ſpecies which conſtitutes the moſt eſſential quality of a man of TASTE. Who indeed ever knew a mere ſoldier, a mere politician, a mere ſcholar to be a man of TASTE?

WERE we to erect a temple to TASTE, every SCIENCE ſhould furniſh a pillar, every VIRTUE ſhould there have an altar, and the three GRACES ſhould hold the high-prieſthood in commiſſion.

WE daily ſee pretenders to this quality endeavouring to diſplay it in a parade of dreſs and equipage; but theſe, alas! can only produce a beau. We ſee others ſet up for it amongſt cards and dice; but theſe can create nothing better than a gameſter. Others in brothels, which only form a debauchee. Some have run for it at Newmarket; ſome have drank for it at the King's-arms; the former, to their great ſurpriſe, have acquired only the title of good jockeys, the latter of jolly Bucks. There are many who aim at it in literary compoſitions, and gain at moſt the character of intruding authors.

HOWEVER, this general purſuit of TASTE has it's uſes: thoſe numbers who go in queſt of it, where it is never to be found, ſerve at leaſt as ſo many marks that teach us to avoid ſteering the ſame unſucceſsful courſe.

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THE plain truth of the matter is, a houſe filled with fine pictures, the ſideboard loaded with maſſy plate, the ſplendid equipage, with all the hey-dukes, pages, and ſervants that attend it, do not entitle the poſſeſſor to be called a man of TASTE: they only bring with them either anxiety or contempt to thoſe whoſe rank and fortunes are not equal to ſuch oſtentation. I will be bold to ſay therefore, notwithſtanding ſome of your readers will doubtleſs look upon me as an unpoliſhed vandal, that the beſt inſtance any man can give of his TASTE, is to ſhew that he has too much delicacy to reliſh any thing ſo low and little, as the purchaſe of ſuperfluities at another's coſt, or with his own ruin. At leaſt, the placid ſatisfaction of that man's heart, who prudently meaſures his expences, and confines his deſires within the circle of his annual revenue, begets that well-ordered diſpoſition of mind, without which it is impoſſible to merit the character of a man of juſt refined TASTE.

CERTAIN it is, that He beſt diſcovers the juſtneſs of his TASTE, who beſt knows how to purſue and ſecure the moſt ſolid and laſting happineſs. Now where ſhall we look for this with ſo much probability of finding it, as in temperance and tranquillity of mind, in ſocial and domeſtic enjoyments? Are not theſe the firſt and moſt eſſential objects of TASTE? Certainly they are: and when a man has once acquired theſe, he may, if fortune and nature have properly qualified him, launch out into a more extenſive compaſs, and diſplay his genius in a larger circle.

BUT it will be difficult, I fear, to preſuade thoſe young men of the preſent generation, who are ambitious of eſtabliſhing a character for TASTE, to advance towards it by ſo ſlow and regular a progreſſion. They ſeem in general to be poſſeſſed with a kind of EPIC madneſs, and are for hurrying at once into the midſt of things. But perhaps you, Mr. Fitz-Adam, may be able by reaſon or by ridicule to call back their attention to the previous ſteps; to perſuade them to learn to walk, before they attempt to run; to convince them, that profuſion in architecture, in gardening, in equipage, in dreſs &c. can ſerve no other purpoſe but to diſturb their imaginations, and to give them a general diſtaſte of themſelves, and of every thing around them.

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IT is by no means, however, ſurpriſing that this character of TASTE ſhould be ſo univerſally ſought after; as true TASTE is doubtleſs the higheſt point of perfection, at which human nature, in this her ſtate of frailty, can poſſibly arrive. A man endowed with this quality, poſſeſſes all his ſenſes in the manner beſt adapted to receive the impreſſion of every true pleaſure, which providence has ſcattered with a liberal hand for the delight of it's creature. There is nothing intrinſically beautiful which does not furniſh him with perpetual delight; as every thing ill-faſhioned and deformed affects him with diſguſt and abhorrence. That is, in a word, the avenues of his mind are open only to thoſe enjoyments that bring with them the paſports of truth and reaſon.

PHILALETHES is a man of TASTE, according to the notion I have here given of that quality. His conduct is influenced by ſentiment as well as by principle; and if he were ever ſo ſecure of ſecrecy and impunity, he would no more be capable of committing a low or a baſe action, than of admitting a vile performance into his noble collection of paintings and ſculpture. His juſt taſte of the fine arts, and his exquiſite delicacy in moral conduct, are but one and the ſame ſenſe, exerting itſelf upon different objects; a love of beauty, order and propriety, extended to all their various intellectual and viſible exhibitions. Accordingly, PHILALETHES is conſiſtent in every part of his character. You ſee the ſame elegant and noble ſimplicity, the ſame correct and judicious way of thinking, expreſſed in his dreſs, his equipage, his furniture, his gardens and his actions.

How different is MICIO from PHILALETHES! Yet MICIO would be thought a man of TASTE. But the misfortune is, he has not a heart for it. I ſay a heart, however odd the expreſſion may ſound: for as a celebrated ancient has defined an orator to be *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, ſo I muſt inſiſt upon it, that a good heart is an eſſential ingredient to form a good TASTE. When I ſee MICIO, therefore, diſſipating his health and ſtrength in lewd embraces and midnight revels; when I ſee him throwing away over-night at the gaming table, what he muſt refuſe the next morning to the juſt clamours of his injured tradeſmen; I am not the leaſt ſurpriſed at his trimmed trees, his unnatural terraſſes, his French *treillage*, his Dutch parterres, his Chineſe bells, and his tawdry equipage.

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